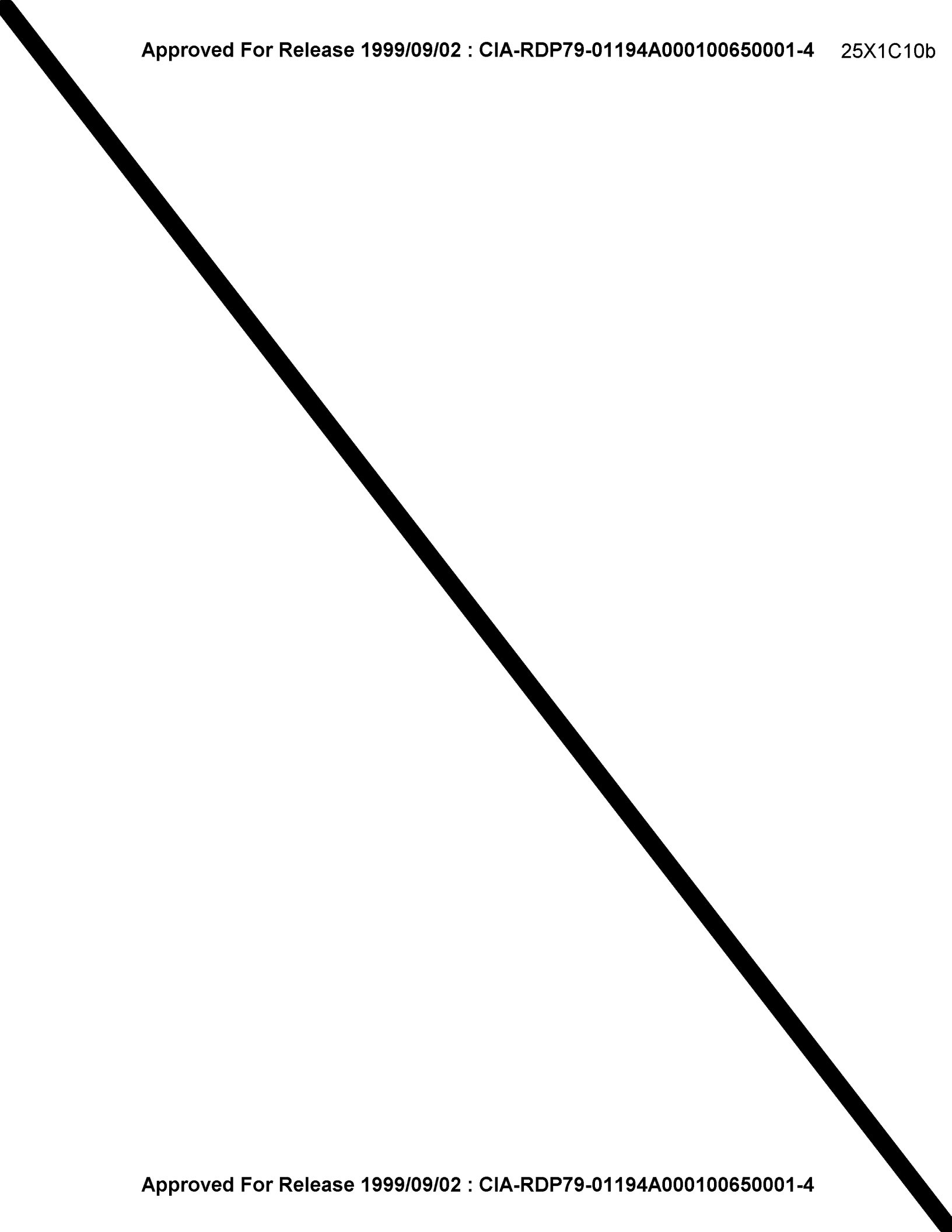

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Three Baskets for Europe

—Keith Kyle discusses the prospects for the Geneva Conference on Security and Co-operation

The all-European Conference on Security and Co-operation, attended by 33 of the 34 European states, the United States and Canada, resumed this week in Geneva after breaking off on 6 April for Easter. Until late on the night preceding the Easter break, questions about the rate of progress of the Conference's second (expert-level) stage had deserved, as the chief Soviet delegate Anatoly Gavrolivitch Kovalev told an interviewer, to be answered 'in the words of the well-known song, "The stream moves and yet it does not."' However, the late-night session on 5 April produced what many think, depending on the ultimate political decisions, could be a watershed. An agreed text was registered for the third of the ten principles which are supposed in future to govern the conduct of relations between European states, that of the 'inviolability of frontiers'.

This might not, on the face of it, seem to be much of a sensation, though it is manifestly of cardinal importance to the Russians and their allies. In the absence of a formal peace settlement of the Second World War, these countries have shown a consistent anxiety to achieve universal recognition of the full legitimacy of their territorial gains in that war. 'Non-recognition of frontiers,' explained Otto Winzer, the East German Foreign Minister, in Helsinki last July, 'was part and parcel of the political and diplomatic preparation for the Second World War. As early as the Weimar Republic, the slogan "Secure peace without stabilising the status quo" was used in pursuing a policy of revision of German frontiers.'

For whatever reason, Brezhnev had invested an immense amount of personal, national and ideological prestige in the success of this Conference. No doubt it was for that reason that he authorised the verbal concessions that made the Easter agreement on Principle 3 possible. The essence of the compromise was that 'inviolability of frontiers' was accepted in an unqualified fashion—which was the indispensable Russian requirement—but the word 'existing' was dropped before 'frontiers' and it was agreed that 'peaceful change' of frontiers by mutual agreement should be incorporated into one of the later principles. The Russians had been adamant that it should not intrude into Principle 3, and on this the others gave way.

Even now, there are West German reservations about the form and placing of the reference to 'peaceful change' and in favour of a clear reference to each of the ten principles being interpreted in the light of the others. It is not surprising that the West Germans are so particular. As their Foreign Minister put it at Helsinki, the possibility of frontier changes by peaceful means in mutual agreement is important to them for two reasons. 'On the one hand, it is in the interest of those members of the European Community who have already set their sights on transforming the totality of their relations into a European Union before the end of this decade; on the other, it is, as the Federal Government has often emphasised, the political aim of the Federal Republic of Germany to help create a state of peace in Europe in which the German nation can regain its unity in free self-determination.' It would indeed contribute to the 'Finlandisation' of Europe if the Russians acquired through the ten principles of pan-European good conduct a title to claim to be consulted over the internal evolution of the EEC, precisely as the Finnish President had to wait on Moscow's goodwill before signing a free-trade agreement with Brussels.

Such precautions may appear far-fetched, and, indeed, out of proportion to the sceptical Western view of the substantive value of such declarations of principle. But it is difficult for the West, accustomed to the brutal realism of Soviet policy, to visualise a Soviet leader investing so much in what appears to be a trivial end. The inviolability of frontiers is much more efficiently guaranteed, and is likely to be for the indefinite future, by the military strength of the Super-Powers. There must, it is assumed, be some long-range trick. The Soviet Union, which has been indefatigable in inflating the importance of the Conference, now seems rather indifferent about the wording once it has got its 'inviolability of frontiers'. The West—or at any rate the European Nine—which is inclined to downgrade the whole operation, is negotiating as if every word was indeed liable to govern intra-European relations from here to eternity.

The pressures will now clearly be on to wind up the remaining proceedings quickly and sweep them off the diplomatic stage. After all, the preliminary consultations to fix an agenda began in Helsinki as far back as January 1973 and lasted six months—'an enormous talking exercise' Michel Jobert called it, 'to which each country has contributed its best and its worst'. The Ministerial session, the first stage of the Conference proper, followed in July. The second stage, transferred from Helsinki to Geneva, has been on since September at expert level, the British delegation still being led by the Ambassador to

Finland, Anthony Elliott, who, having once mastered the intricate special language which surrounds any new diplomatic venture, has been permitted to see the whole process through. Although, except for the one precious principle, little of a contentious nature has been completed, there has now gradually grown up an informal understanding that the third stage, the crowning Helsinki Conference, is to be held this July.

The West European states have always sought to avoid negotiating to a deadline. They have known from the outset that Brezhnev was set on a summit to give dignity and importance to the final document; they were determined not to impart such authority to a meaningless instrument that was 'all dressed up like a well-kept grave'. If it meant all that much to Brezhnev he should be made to pay. The problems of the agenda had been solved by an agreement to deposit the ideas of all states in three 'baskets', labelled respectively 'security measures', 'economic co-operation' and 'co-operation over human rights'. The West has concerted its tactics at two levels —in the Nine of the EEC and in the Nato Council. In essence, these tactics have amounted to defensive action over Basket 1, to prevent 'principles' of Soviet origin laying the foundation for Soviet political interference, and offensive action over Basket 3. At the personal, cultural and humanitarian levels there must be a progressive loosening up of contacts and flows of information between East and West. As Sir Alec Douglas-Home put it at Helsinki, 'Basket 1 will be empty unless there are plenty of eggs in Basket 3.' Soviet commentators put it differently. 'An attempt is being made,' explained Yuri Zhukov, the political commentator of *Pravda* on Moscow television on 30 March, 'to eclipse the essential with the secondary. Some people stubbornly push to the foreground so-called humanitarian problems, above all the notorious demagogic thesis of what is termed the free exchange of ideas and people, by which is really meant freedom to interfere in the internal affairs of the socialist states.'

So long as discussion on Basket 3 fails to make progress, it remains an embarrassment to the Soviet Union. Zhukov and other spokesmen are obliged to assert vigorously and repeatedly that they are strongly for 'the free exchange of truthful information' and the 'extensive development of cultural relations and direct contacts between people'. All that they are 'decisively against' is the 'dragging into our house under the false flag of information' of such 'misanthropic ideas' as 'slander of socialism, fascism and militarism, national hostility and racial hatred and the cult of force'. Presumably Senator Edward Kennedy's attempt on Saturday to start off debate, in American campus fashion, with Soviet students in Moscow on such subjects as the size of the Soviet defence budget and travel restrictions for foreign visitors fell under one or several of those heads.

The precise extent to which Brezhnev should be required to purchase his ceremonial summit in the coin of humanitarian practice is not yet completely agreed upon within the West European camp. This is, after all, an unconventional area of international negotiation, encroaching necessarily onto what are classically internal affairs. The Dutch have gone the furthest—further, indeed, than some of their partners think wise—in specifying precise performance in many of those areas of human rights in which the Soviet performance is notoriously lacking. The Nine, acting together, have concentrated more on issues that could be said to have been left over from the Second World War, such as the reunion of separated families, together with issues relating to the free flow of information. Detailed proposals have been made on the rights and working conditions of foreign correspondents, on the exchange of television films, and on the right of easy access by nationals to shops selling foreign newspapers. The Italians and the Norwegians have been trying to make European intermarriages much easier. The difficulty with most of these proposals is that they involve the Eastern bloc countries, and no one else, in changing their existing practices. On the other hand, the Polish-Bulgarian proposal, which is the basis of what the Warsaw Pact has to offer for Basket 3, stresses highly structured activities, such as contacts between cultural and educational institutions, conferences and seminars. The public authorities in the West are less capable than they are in the East of guaranteeing that such events actually occur, since Western performance in many of these spheres depends largely on private individuals and organisations.

If the Conference achieves nothing else, it will have provided an excellent dry run for political co-operation among the Nine. Their delegations caucus every day at one level or another in order to concert tactics. For Baskets 1 and 3, they operate under the rules for political co-operation, that is without the Commission. Their chief spokesman is the delegate of the country which is the current chairman of the EEC's Council of Ministers, in the current instance West Germany, though some delicacy has to be displayed to avoid too much of an appearance of operating as a bloc against the declared spirit of the Conference. Sometimes other countries speak for the Nine, or there is an expression of individual views. In Basket 2, where much quiet progress has been made in the drawing up of rules for economic and technological co-operation, the Commission speaks for the Community over matters that fall directly under the Treaty of Rome. Since the Soviet Union and its allies do not recognise the international standing of the Commission, a splendid diplomatic compromise has developed whereby the Commission's spokesman, a Belgian, sits as a member of the German delegation during the German chairmanship of the Nine. Finally, in the only aspect of the entire Security Conference which deals with what the layman normally associates with the concept of security, the so-called confidence-building measures—prior notifications of military movements and manoeuvres, rights of military observers etc—the Nine are for the first time in the life of the Community engaged in putting forward a united line on a question of defence. It is a line, moreover, which is more radical than that favoured by either the USSR or the United States.

The new factor in the situation, which is now putting the Western delegations under additional pressure, is the evident desire of President Nixon to attend an impressive summit some time this summer—perhaps when he would otherwise be having to stand trial before the Senate for 'high crimes and misdemeanours'. Since it now appears, after Kissinger's last visit to Moscow, that Salt Two will not be ripe for a Brezhnev-Nixon encounter, and since it looks doubtful if any European-American declaration will be edited in time, a big signing ceremony in Helsinki might fill the bill. While, therefore, the West Europeans are hoping to remain uncommitted until the last on either the concluding date of the second stage or the level of representation at the ceremonial third stage, so as to maintain the maximum pressure on Brezhnev to get ahead speedily with the real bargaining, they are in some danger of [illegible] carefully-hoarded negotiating points being treated as the small change of mutual political accommodations between the top men of the Super-Powers.

NEUE ZUERCHER ZEITUNG

4 May 74

ELEVENTH HOUR MOOD IN GENEVA

The all European assembly of diplomats that has been going on in Geneva since last summer as an intermediate phase of the so-called European "security conference" (CSCE) seems to be heading rapidly toward its conclusion. One evidently likes to conclude by June the maneuvering on this plane in order to follow it up as soon as possible with the grand concluding apotheosis. With all this, the suspicion has been growing for some time that the final phase may end in an exchange deal between Washington and Moscow, that is to say, that the Americans are inclined to meet the Soviet urge for a finish by some "goodwill" gesture provided a Soviet "goodwill" could be obtained for it in tougher matters such as SALT or Kissinger's negotiations with Syria.

Such a deal would not particularly promote the impression that much seriousness is being given the subjects negotiated in Geneva. Nor do other indications, for which the responsibility lies elsewhere, seem to deny it. The famous "basket three," that is to say, the demand for increased human contacts and information exchange between West and East, which the West only a year ago had declared to be the touchstone for the Soviet will for detente, has been talked and handed about in such a distracted manner that no binding result of any significance has become visible thus far. Moscow has a good chance to get off easy here.

With it, Moscow recently got good opportunities for getting something the West originally did not want to give at all -- the maintaining of this all European forum and, possibly, its institutionalization. It would mean, to put it bluntly, nothing else but a permanent participation by the Soviet Union in all European affairs. That no doubt was its intention from the very start in having this conference, by which the Soviet Union intends, among other things, to consolidate and expand its influence on the continent. And that also is the reason why particularly the NATO partners did not want to set up such a state of permanency. Other delegations too, the Swiss for example, had not wanted to know of it for a long time. What has changed to induce this attitude to change?

How unilaterally in favor of Soviet intentions, how contrary to the original ideas of the West European partners this conference has developed, can be seen by comparing the earlier Western positions with reality as it emerged step by step. Originally they did not want to hold this conference on this side of the line of demarcation at all, it was reminiscent of old projects by Stalin. Finally they agreed, as compensation for the Berlin accords, so to speak, which however in turn had already been tied in with the German Eastern treaties. They wanted to make the calling of this all European body dependent on reaching substantive understanding through a probing phase. No understanding resulted in Helsinki, but the conference was called anyway. They definitely wanted to see it combined with negotiations on balanced troop reduction, but there was not a word about it. They wanted to insist with an equally great emphasis on real measures of relaxation that would make themselves felt to the people living in divided Europe. No word about it. They wanted to agree to a formal conference conclusion on a high or even highest level only if the Geneva intermediate phase had produced concrete results of this kind. Not another word about it. Instead, as mentioned, there is now talk of an open-ended "follow-up," which would turn Moscow into an authoritative referee in European affairs. That is exactly what they had wanted to avoid.

The whole thing, one may assume, will soon -- perhaps in summer or in fall -- be presented to public opinion by the governments involved, through appropriate bits of ceremonials, as a significant achievement of detente, and once again one will be satisfied with big words substituting for meager content, and one will be pleased to forget what one had wanted to achieve by accepting what in fact was achieved. Broad diplomatic circles in Geneva are of the opinion that the public will accept this exercise without question. For first of all -- as a Nordic statesman remarked recently -- the public was "fortunately" not well enough informed to be able to pass judgment on the "compromise" it was presented with. Secondly, possible skeptics were easily isolated by the label of being "against detente," as exemplified by the propaganda from the Soviets and their satellites in recent weeks. And thirdly, voices of skepticism will be drowned out in any case by the applause of a credulous Europe.

No summit, thank you

THE ECONOMIST
1 June 1974

Awful darkness and silence reign over the great Gromboolian plain on which the hundreds of negotiators involved in the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe have skirmished obscurely for 18 months. On Tuesday Mr Kosygin, bravely assuming the role of the Dong with a luminous nose, claimed that the conference has achieved "definite results" and made the umpteenth Soviet call for it to be climaxed with a 35-government meeting "at the highest level". But the truth is that it has produced no results, and there is no reason to disguise this fact by staging a climactic meeting at any level. On the same day that Mr Kosygin spoke, the Dutch foreign minister, Mr Max van der Stoel, voiced the view shared by the majority of those involved in the conference when he said that continued Russian intransigence in the negotiations would mean that "what was started in Helsinki so hopefully will end in disappointment in Geneva".

That disappointment, however, would not be great, or widespread. The conference was Mr Brezhnev's brainchild. There was never any mystery about the reasons for his enthusiasm. After his army had scragged its Czechoslovak allies in 1968, he wanted to refurbish Russia's image, to assuage western fears, and to give more legitimacy to the Soviet-dominated status quo in eastern Europe. Non-communist Europeans, perceiving his motives, were in no hurry to accommodate him, and the preparatory talks in Helsinki that were the real beginning of the process were not started until late in 1972. To get the conference formally launched last July, he had to concede three main points: American and Canadian participation alongside that of the 33 European governments (every European state except Albania accepted an invitation); the holding of parallel talks, in Vienna, about reducing the two alliances' forces in Europe; and the inclusion in the agenda of the question of free contacts between western and eastern Europe. These Soviet concessions gave some ground for the hopes to which Mr van der Stoel referred on Tuesday, but they were no more than procedural concessions.

Since September, when the negotiators got down to the hard bargaining stage at Geneva, no real progress has been made. Indeed, the Russians have gone back on some of their earlier apparent concessions, particularly during the past few weeks. And the parallel talks on force cuts have run into a parallel deadlock. Of course, it is a familiar Soviet practice to maintain absolute rigidity, in the stone-bottomed style once identified with Molotov, up to the eleventh hour of a negotiation, and then to offer a sudden shift—a minimal concession designed to make the other party settle for whatever is offered rather than go home empty-handed. Such a shift may be imminent. But it will need to be a big one if it is to bring about any kind of signing ceremony in Helsinki next month. There seems no prospect of its being big enough to bring Mr Brezhnev the spectacular gathering at the summit for which he still yearns.

The anchorman doubt

Mr van der Stoel was only the latest of a series of western spokesmen who, since last July, have warned Mr Brezhnev that their governments will not join the chorus line of a ballet choreographed in Moscow. Britain's Labour government might be less reluctant than its Conservative predecessor to play such a role, but it would probably not join in the show unless its European allies did; and they, evidently, would not. The French have never liked this whole conference; the Germans' interest in it has been reduced by Herr Schmidt's arrival as chancellor as well as by the Russians' unyielding attitude. In the Geneva talks, disenchantment is as widespread among the non-allied delegations as among those of the smaller Nato members.

The weakest link in the western chain has seemed to be its customary anchorman, the United States. As the darkness deepens around Mr Nixon, he appears to be fixing his eyes on the chink of light he sees in his projected journey to Moscow at the end of June; and he obviously wants to lend artistic verisimilitude to this trip by linking it with some diplomatic feat that could be cited to persuade people not to topple a president who is working hard, and

successfully, for peace. He is said to be thinking of going straight from Russia to the Middle East. He is known to hope that he and Mr Brezhnev will be able to sign a treaty extending the 1963 partial ban on nuclear test explosions to all underground tests above a specified size. But this test ban move may not be enough for his domestic purposes, and even Mr Kissinger's latest Middle East coup may not either. So Mr Nixon's visible need to be seen taking some more dramatic initiative has caused anxious speculation at Geneva about the possibility of his joining with Mr Brezhnev in calling for a pan-European summit at Helsinki and for the signing of a text that would contain no Soviet concessions of any real value.

If such a call does come, Europeans should give it a cold shoulder. The signing of the kind of document that Mr Brezhnev has in mind would not serve the cause of true east-west detente. It would gravely injure that cause. A conference on security and co-operation in Europe that does not give Europeans more security and more chances of co-operating can only be a palpably delusive fake, and if this fake is accepted as reality the world is liable to become a more dangerous place, not a more peaceful one.

Throughout these 18 months of negotiation, the non-communist participants have insisted that the conference must not produce mere platitudes. But the Russians, although happy to set down any number of vague general principles, have invariably jibbed at translating them into practical terms. They accepted, for instance, the desirability of giving advance notice of military manoeuvres, but then reduced this to meaninglessness by piling on restrictive conditions. They have used these blocking tactics most obviously on freedom of contact between east and west Europeans. A year ago, they agreed that the conference should seek to bring about "freer movement and contacts" and "freer and wider dissemination of information of all kinds" among the participating countries. This has not stopped them from obstructing not only the more sweeping of the western negotiators' proposals for lowering barriers between Europeans, but even such strictly limited proposals as those made about the reuniting of divided families.

Detente means relaxation. For Europeans to relax, with any real sense of security, they need to be freed from the fears created by artificial barriers and obsessive secrecy, as well as those that arise from the superiority in armed forces of a heavily militarised eastern Europe. Neither at Geneva nor in the force cuts talks at Vienna have Mr Brezhnev's delegates offered them any freedom from these fears. He invites them to relax on the strength of fine words alone. Any western government that solemnly accepts and signs documents framed in this spirit will betray the hopes for peace not only of its own people but of all Europe.

End it cleanly, or keep slogging on?

If the Russians continue their stone-bottomed act, and destroy the last hopes of lifting the conference on to a level that could justify the holding of a final stage this summer, is there any point in keeping it alive? In July, the first anniversary is due of its formal opening at Helsinki, when the president of Finland welcomed it with a speech in which he pointedly remarked that security was achieved not by building fences but by opening gates. This notion of Mr Kekkonen's must have struck the Russians as a wholly new idea. New ideas take a long time to percolate in a closed society like Mr Brezhnev's Russia, and it seems just possible that another year or so of slogging on with this conference might be worthwhile. But this would call for an enormous amount of patience and resolution by the western negotiators and their governments. They will not be to blame if the whole thing peters out during the next few months. Mr Brezhnev, on the other hand, may find himself blamed by very many people in both-halves of Europe. He might be wise to start thinking about this now.